

Rev. Dr. Warren Clark

Tampa, FL 33617

January 7, 2009

Judge Leonie Brinkema
Albert V. Bryan U.S. Courthouse
401 Courthouse Square
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Judge Brinkema:

Dr. Sami AlArian led people in his mosque to join H.O.P.E., Hillsborough Organization for Progress and Equality. H.O.P.E. is an organization of about twenty religious congregations (almost all other being Christian) that work together for basic social and economic justice here in Tampa. That's where I got to know him before he was arrested. When Attorney General John Ashcroft proclaimed on national news that the Justice Department had arrested the head of Palestinian Islamic Jihad in North America, I didn't know what to think. It did not seem to match the colleague I knew. I have to admit I was at first afraid to publically stand up on his behalf. About a year later Dr. AlArian was moved to the Hillsborough County Jail to await trial. By then I was less intimidated. I asked myself what can I do as a pastor? And the words, "I was in prison and you visited me", came o ind. So, I began visiting him every week for the 15 months he was held here. On most visits I invited clergy from many different faith groups to visit with me. In that period of time I got to know Dr. AlArian pretty well. I was not surprised when the jury, after a six month trial, unanimously voted not guilty on all violence-related charges. The jury voted not guilty ten to two on the other counts.

I listened after the trial as Dr. AlArian agonized about whether to plead on some of the remaining counts. He did not want to let those who had supported him down. He adamantly refused to plead to anything he had not done. But his family was exhausted, and so were his financial resources. The things he pled to were incredibly minor compared to the initial charges lodged on national television.

I have watched in dismay as the justice system has been distorted by misuse of the grand jury process. I am no lawyer, just a pastor, but I can see when the jury system is being thwarted. That is a powerful and dangerous assault on our basic liberties that go all the way back to Saxon law.

So, as a pastor, I urge you to exercise mercy. It is time for him to be set free. As a citizen I very much hope you will consider the implications of extending jail time indefinitely by the misuse of the grand jury process.

Sincerely,



Dr. Warren Clark

(Until Jan. 4, 2009 Pastor of First United Church (UCC) of Tampa)